



## **3 Steps to Building a Successful Author Platform**

Congratulations! You've started the process of successfully promoting yourself and your books. We've broken the process down into three steps. Here's what the seasoned experts have to say about each one.

## **Step 1: Form a strategy**

1. Strategic Marketing for Authors
2. What's Your Author Brand?
3. Marketing a Fiction Book vs. Marketing a Nonfiction Book

## **Step 2: Build your platforms**

1. Four Ideas for Kick-Ass Author Website Content
2. The Musts (and Common Mistakes) of Author Website Development
3. Report: Author Website Copy That Sells
4. Four Musts for Building an Author Email List

## **Step 3: Learn and grow**

1. Blogging Mistakes Authors Often Make
2. Your Author Website Analytics: What It May Be Telling You
3. How Do You Track Book Sales?
4. Author Wisdom: What I Wished I'd Known Sooner



# 1. Strategic Marketing for Authors

All authors need to do some form of marketing to get their books out there. But there's a difference between generic marketing and strategic marketing for authors. Here's what strategic marketing is, why it's important, and how authors can put together a strategic marketing plan for their unique needs.

## What Is Strategic Marketing and Why Should I Use It?

According to BusinessDictionary.com, strategic marketing is "Identification of one or more sustainable competitive advantages a firm has in the markets it serves (or intends to serve), and allocation of resources to exploit them."



As its name implies, strategic marketing means marketing with thought and purpose. By mapping out your marketing plans early, and having clear and consistent goals related to it, you can figure out how to allot your time and money appropriately. You can make sure your marketing work is always laddering up to a marketing goal. You can prevent yourself from getting pulled off track on opportunities that come your way but that may be outside your target.

Doing all of this starts by putting together a strategic marketing plan.

## **What Goes Into a Strategic Marketing Plan?**

All types of businesses put together strategic marketing plans. According to TheBalance.com, these are the five steps that go into a strategic marketing plan for any business.

- **Company Positioning** (Where are you now? What hold do you have on your field?)
- **Goals and Strategies** (What would you consider a success? Where do you want to go?)
- **Market Opportunities** (What markets are out there for you to target? Who is already reaching those markets?)
- **Target Market Defined** (What does that market want? How can you differentiate yourself from what else is out there?)
- **Marketing Budget** (How much do you have to invest in your marketing — both in terms of money and manpower?)

## **How Do We Turn This Strategic Marketing Plan Into Strategic Marketing for Authors?**

Let's translate those five pieces above into author speak. Here are questions for you to ask yourself as you put this plan together.

### **1. Author Positioning**

- Are you already known by some in your field?
- Do you have relationships with publishers, agents, booksellers, etc...
- Do you have a blog that people follow already? An email list? A social media following?

### **2. Goals and Strategies**

- Is your primary goal for your first book to be a bestseller?
- Do you plan to publish future books and build an audience for those?

- Do you want to build a platform to get yourself out there as an author, speaker, coach, etc...?

### **3. Market Opportunities**

- Who does your book speak to? What age/race/gender?
- Are there platforms that already speak to these audiences?
- Who do you know that can reach them?

### **4. Target Market Defined**

- What research is out there about your target market and what they're looking for?
- How can you meet their needs in a way that no one else currently is?

### **5. Marketing Budget**

- How much money do you have to spend on marketing?
- How much time do you have to spend on marketing?
- What resources are at your disposal to help?

### **So What Would Strategic Marketing for Authors Look Like?**

I'm going to create an example here. Obviously, you would customize this for yourself based on your book.

But for the sake of this exercise, let's say you're writing a self-help book for middle-aged people looking to reinvent themselves. You might put together a strategic marketing plan that has an outline sort of like this.

**Target Market:** Men and women ages 45-55

#### **Goals:**

I want to....

- Become a successful author, speaker and life coach for this audience

- Sell 100,000 copies of the first book
- Build enough of an email list to sell future books and get other work speaking/coaching on the site

### **Ways to reach that audience:**

- This age bracket spends a lot of time on Facebook, so creating a Facebook presence is essential.
- A formal author website with a blog is also important for me. Many people are actively searching for information on reinventing themselves, and having an active blog can drive that traffic to my site and lead to book sales and list building.
- This age group also includes some empty nesters or divorcees who join book clubs and community groups, so I should invest some time in off-line efforts in these areas.
- This age group is also generally avid readers of publications like HuffPost, so I will reach out to HuffPost and similar organizations about potentially becoming a regular blogger.
- Many of the women in this age group spend time on GoodReads, so I should create a profile there.

### **Meeting their needs:**

#### *Example:*

This book is different from any other services out there that help with reinventing yourself because XYZ. Research shows that people in this situation really want help with X, but everything else that's out there is only doing Y. I need to brand myself and my book as the only resource that meets this particular need. So I need a tagline on my website that clearly spells out what makes me and my book unique. And that should also be on my business card, and part of my elevator pitch.

### **Investment:**

I have about \$3,200 available to invest in marketing. Based on the information above, I will divide it as follows:

- \$1,200 for author website development
- \$500 on Facebook ads
- \$500 on Google ads

- \$1,000 on a press kit/press release

I also only want to spend five hours a week on marketing. With that in mind, I will:

- Spend one hour a week blogging (both on my site and on other sites that reach my target audience)
- Spend one hour a week on scheduling Facebook posts and responding to Facebook comments
- Spend one hour a week on GoodReads (starting conversations, joining groups, etc...)
- Spend one hour a week reaching out to locals in my community that might have book groups, support groups, etc...
- Leave my last hour per week for any miscellaneous marketing needs that may come up

### **The End Goal of Your “Strategic Marketing for Authors” Plan**

By mapping out what your needs and goals are, and how you can position yourself to reach your target audience, you can make sure all your time, effort and money are being distributed appropriately. For example, after putting this marketing plan together, you know that Twitter, for example, is not a good place to invest your time and money. Having this mapped out and ready will prevent you from making costly marketing mistakes in the future.

## 2. What's Your Author Brand?



Like it or not, today's author also has to be a marketer. And what is it that you are marketing? Well, it's your brand.

But what exactly is your author brand? What are your options? What's going to stick in everyone's mind after they've visited your site?

Here are four directions that I've seen authors go in terms of their branding, and examples of each one. I hope this sparks ideas for you!

### **1. Yourself**

This is probably the case for 75% of the authors that I work with. Their brand is ... well ... themselves.

This is most relevant for authors who want to become household names (hello, Stephen King!) and hope to write multiple books in a specific genre. For a nonfiction author, your

self-focused brand might also include any consulting or speaking you hope to do on the same topic.

For a self-branded site, your name would be both the URL and “title” at the header of your site. Your photo would also be prominent, and the site design should clearly reflect your personality and the genre you’re writing in.

Goals of an author-branded site would be to build followers (email sign-ups, likes, people “following” you, return visitors) so that people who like your first book will then be aware of your upcoming books, and you have a way to continue communicating with them as each future book comes to fruition.

See examples of author-branded sites that we’ve built at:

<http://charmainepauls.com>

<http://judithruskayrabinorphd.com>

<http://ronaldacooper.com/>

<http://donnawilsonphd.org/>

<http://williamrmarchandmd.com/>

<http://www.marvinamazon.com/>

<http://annweisgarber.com/>

## **2. Your book**

Maybe you were inspired to write this one book. It could be a biography. It could be your story of survival through a crisis. Maybe it’s a collection of stories you put together. But if your plan is to write this one book — and only one book — then it makes sense for the book to be the brand. After all, the goal is to sell the book, right? It’s not to build a legion of fans.

In a case of a book site, the site title and URL should reflect the book title, and the book cover should be front and center in the design. In addition, the site’s look and feel should directly resemble the book cover. After all, the site is an extension of the book in these cases, so it makes all the sense in the world to carry the colors and graphics from the book cover into the book-focused website.

The goal of a book-branded site is simple: sell the book. This type of site should have “buy the book” buttons everywhere, and primarily should serve to whet people’s appetite until they make the purchase.

See examples of book-branded sites:

<http://iwanttoknowhowtogrow.com/>

<http://www.topekatornado.com/>

<http://praiseandworshipwithflags.com/>

<http://knowyourenemybook.com/>

### **3. Your series**

Let’s say that you want to be the next JK Rowling. You’ve just finished your first Harry Potter-like book, and plan to write the rest of the series over the next few years.

This site, in many ways, would be a hybrid of the two above. The title/URL should be the same as the name of the book series. The design should also be very closely tied to the book covers, and contain any color schemes, images or fonts that will run through the entire series. But the goals of this site would be closer to that of an author-focused brand. After all, not only do you want people to buy the first book, but you want to make sure you retain their attention for the future books. Collecting email addresses/subscribers/followers is key, because that’s the best way to make sure that you catch their attention again when the next book of the series is out.

### **4. Your cause**

Maybe your brand is much bigger than yourself or your book. Maybe you are trying to start a movement or build a new product line. That movement could be spiritual in nature, it could be political, or it could be a service that you offer. Regardless, in these instances, you and the book are only pieces of the puzzle. The true goal is bigger than both of you.

For sites like these, a uniquely-designed logo is key. That logo needs to have a catchy title — and picking a name for your brand is not something to take lightly — and should be something that will hopefully be recognizable to a wide audience in the future. Think nonprofit, like Autism Speaks, or for-profit, like, H&R Block. Sure those are big examples, but they’re good role models.

Front and center in your site design should be your mission and why people should be interested. This can be done in images, video and/or text ... or all of the above. The book can be featured prominently in the design, but it should be viewed as a supporting item to boost the message, not the end all and be all.

The beauty of a cause-based site is that it can grow as much as you want it to. Plan to sell t-shirts and bracelets that advance the mission? That will fit nicely into the brand. Want to start a petition on your site, sell your services, or build an online community for people to connect on the issue? That also is an easy addition. All of it ties into the goal of your book and your website; you and the book are just part of the supporting cast, if you will.

See how different your website will be depending on which type of branding you decide to go with? Choose wisely ... it will make a big difference in the success of your book, your website, and ultimately, your brand.

### 3. Marketing a Fiction Book vs. Marketing a Nonfiction Book

There are lots of companies that say they can market your book online. And maybe they can. But what they fail to tell you is that there's not one standard formula that works for all authors. Marketing a teen horror novel is very, very different from trying to sell copies of a self-help book about finding your soul mate. Very different audiences.

I could spend hours writing about how reaching tweens and teens requires more social networking, while reaching 60-somethings is more effectively done through search engines, but I won't bother. Instead, the purpose of this post is to talk about the specific differences between marketing fiction books and non-fiction books.



These two categories of books are completely separate beasts. Let's start with why people read them. Someone generally reads a non-fiction book to boost their knowledge on something. To learn more on a subject. That same person would probably read a novel because they find it relaxing. Or entertaining. Or they like the rush. Or the humor. You get the drift.

Here's the point: What prompts someone to buy a fiction book is completely different from what prompts someone to buy a non-fiction book. Let's start with those motivations and see how that brings us back to the marketing side of things.

### **What they Have in Common**

There's one thing that works for every type of book. It's every author's dream. It's "buzz" or word of mouth. Your friends are all talking about this book. It's the topic of conversation at the water cooler. So you have to buy it. It could be a biography or a fantasy. Doesn't matter. If it's popular, you need to read it to stay in the loop.

But tell the truth — what are the odds that your book will become cooler talk? If it does, then great! But if it doesn't, you need to find other ways to reach potential readers. And that's where marketing comes in.

### **Promoting a Non-Fiction Book**

In some ways, it's actually a lot easier to do the marketing for a non-fiction book. That's because there are a wealth of potential readers out there who are looking for information on your particular subject at any given moment. They're surfing the web, Googling terms, finding websites that cover the subject matter.

All you have to do is get your book in their face just as they're doing the looking! True, that's easier said than done. But a good place to start is with Search Engine Optimization (SEO) or Google Adwords. It also can involve reaching out to websites that cover the same subject and getting your book plugged as a resource. As a nonfiction author, people are actually looking for you ... you just have to make sure they find you.

### **Promoting a Fiction Book**

This is a little more tricky. Because chances are that your potential readers have never heard of you. Or your characters. They're not necessarily looking for your book. Instead, you have to make sure your book finds them ... and wins them over.

This is where the search engine strategy goes out the window. No one actually goes on Google and searches for "good novels." That's just not how people choose their reading

materials. Instead, they're likely to choose a book because it's on this month's book club list. Or it's recommended on their favorite social networking site.

Yes, social networking — and really “getting yourself out there” is necessary to market a fiction book. It's only when someone stumbles upon your book and is so enamored that they have to read it that they will actually buy your book. So contact groups or educators that you think would benefit from using your book. Recommend your book to bloggers and book club leaders. Get it out there in front of as many people as possible.

Is it more work? Yes. But the rewards are plentiful. Because unless you're a former U.S. President writing an autobiography, or a famous journalist writing an expose about a celebrity, your non-fiction book isn't likely to become a bestseller. But anyone can become the next Nora Roberts or J.K. Rowling. The right book and the right marketing can get you there.

Ready to talk to us about marketing your book online? Get in touch with us for a free consultation!



# 1. Four Ideas for Kick-Ass Author Website Content

What kind of content do you have on your author website? Sure, you have a bio page, a book description, and a few killer book reviews. But is that what's really going to woo readers?

The best way to drive new traffic (i.e. potential readers) to your site is to create some kick-ass author website content – content that gets socially shared, viewed on YouTube, and piques the interest of people who like your writing and your subject matter. And in today's world, simple articles or blog entries just won't do it any more. People want content that is more dynamic, interactive, and visually stimulating. So what kinds of content might do that? Here are four ideas.

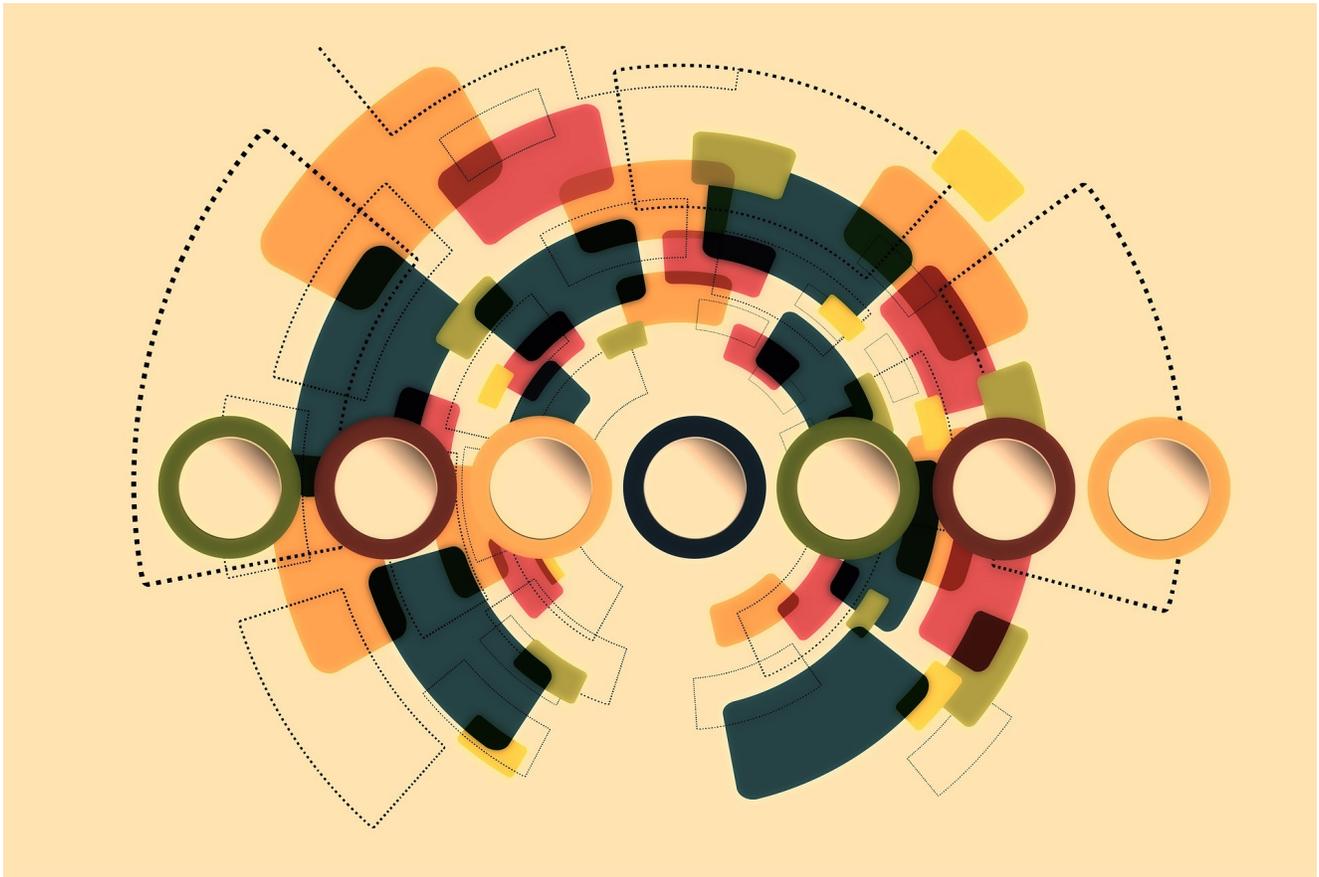
**1. Videos, videos, videos.** I have written blog posts before about how video has become the most popular form of content on the internet. As depressing as this may be for writers, there are plenty of people out there who would prefer to watch a video than read written words. In fact, videos are shared more than articles, and the second most popular search engine on the web today (after Google, of course) is YouTube. So consider turning your blog into a vlog, and creating short video snippets (2-3 minutes is ideal). You can upload your videos directly to Facebook as well, meaning you no longer have to write a blurb for Facebook than then links to your blog. Whether your videos are humorous, inspirational, suspenseful (or whatever your writing style is) you can reach a whole new audience by delving into this content type.

**2. Infographics.** People just love infographics. They're easy to scan, fun to read, and highly sharable. They go bananas on Pinterest. If you have good information to share, you're more likely to get people interested in it if you present it as an infographic instead of straight text.

For example, let's say you write a book about divorce. Consider creating an infographic that breaks down divorce rates by decade, by age, by ethnicity, etc... People just love to absorb information in a visual way, and an infographic like this will get your message out to a much wider audience.

There are some free tools out there, like Canva, which can help you create infographics if you're not artistically inclined.

Hopefully, many of them will then want to learn more and visit your website, or buy your book.



3. **Slideshows/photography.** You've heard the expression, "A picture is worth a thousand words." In today's world of social media, pictures just do better than words. Hands down.

So consider getting your message across in photos instead of words. For example, let's say you wrote a book about World War II. If you have any great photos to share from that era, create a slideshow of them on your site, and share them one-by-one on social.

If, say, you wrote a book about pets, have people share their favorite pet pictures and create a slideshow of those online. Think outside the box, and ponder ways that you can use photography to tell your story.

4. **White papers.** You have information. Your readers want it. So how do you get it to them? Well, the book is one way, of course. But some people want something more immediate (and free). So consider creating downloadable white papers that your readers can use.

Think about some of the overarching messages people get out of your book and create a brief, easy-to-absorb white paper that helps convey those messages from a high level.

Include case studies/testimonials from other people who have learned/grown after reading your book.

If you owned a pastry shop, this would be the free sample you'd give patrons to let them know just how good your pastries are. Do it right and you will have a long-term customer.

Obviously, all of these ideas are easier for nonfiction writers than fiction writers. But even novelists can think outside the box and come up with ways to create videos, graphics, photos, illustrations and more than really attract new readers.

## 2. The Musts (and Common Mistakes) of Author Website Development

An author needs a website. That's a given. But who's going to design it? And how should that process go? That's a good question...

### **Common mistake #1: An author designs his or her own website**

There are many technologies out there which make it easy for an author to sign up for a website hosting package and make their own do-it-yourself website. But that's not the right way to go ... for a variety of reasons. First, unless you've worked on websites before, you probably aren't up-to-speed on the latest trends in websites, what's working for other people, etc... It's the equivalent of doing your own taxes when you're not an accountant. Can you do it? Sure. But will you get the biggest refund? Probably not.

### **Common mistake #2: An author hires a standard website design company to design his or her website**

I had a woman tell me that she hired a designer to create her website. He was local to her, in the Indianapolis area, and when he showed her his portfolio, nearly all of the sites he'd designed had been for race car drivers. I guess that's fairly common in Indiana, but it begs the question: Why did this woman sign an agreement to work with him? He knows nothing about author websites, has no background designing author websites, and has no understanding of what's working and what's not for authors. A website designer might tell you that he or she can design any kind of site, and maybe it's true, but why go with a general contractor to put in new plumbing if you could hire an actual plumber?

### **Common mistake #3: An author is inflexible about his or her website needs**

I had an author call me on the phone. She found my website and was interested in my services. She then went on to tell me that she's basically mapped out everything she wants on the site and just wants me to make it happen. Now, that's just short-sighted. I've built hundreds of author websites. I have a very good understanding of what other authors are doing. I know what's worked on other sites and what hasn't. Why in the world wouldn't you want my input on what we should be doing with the website? I love it when an author comes to me with ideas and balances that by being open to my advice.

## **How it should go**

An author should find a website designer and/or development company that specializes in author websites, and then start asking lots of questions about what the company does, how the process works, what their specialties are, etc... The author should be *asked* lots of questions during that conversation, too. The right kick-off meeting should involve information-collecting on both sides.

Finally, after deciding to work together, the author should share any ideas that he or she has, and ask for the opinion of the expert on staff with that company. Together, the expertise and experience that the company brings, along with the author's creativity and unique understanding of the book and the audience, should create a great final product: an author website that benefits everyone.

### 3. Report: Author Website Copy that Sells



I stumbled across an absolutely fascinating report. It was put together by BookBub and includes some interesting details on what they learned doing A/B testing of copy on author websites.

For those of you who don't know, A/B testing refers to dividing site visitors into two random groups, each experiencing the site with one difference. For example, half of the people who arrive on a site would see the text in black (group A) and the other half would see it in red (group B). The testing then measures how the two groups behave differently, ultimately determining whether you get a better response from the group seeing the text in black or the one seeing the text in red. In the case of authors, a good response = a book sale.

This study focused primarily on what authors were featuring in the copy on their websites, how they worded book descriptions, how they included reviews and more.

This really is a must-read for authors. You can view the full report yourself [here](#), but I've taken the liberty of including some key takeaways...

#### **What Sells Books**

- When including reviews....

- *Mention authors, not publications.* When the site quoted the actual author (not the publication) that gave the book a rave review, there was a 30.4 percent higher click-through rate.
- *Include the number of reviews.* When a book had at least 150 five-star reviews on Amazon or Goodreads, mentioning the exact number of five-star reviews in the copy increased clicks an average of 14.1 percent.
- When writing book promo copy...
  - *Mention your genre up front.* The example in the test compared “If you love thrillers, don’t miss this action-packed read!” to just “An action-packed read!” The one that clearly mentioned “thrillers” got 15.8 percent more clicks.
  - *Cite the time period (when applicable).* In the case of historical fiction, the site that clearly cited the time period had increased clicks at an average of 25.1 percent.
- When promoting yourself...
  - *Don’t forget awards!* If you have won any writing awards in the past — either for this book or other writings — mentioning it would increase clicks an average of 6.7 percent.

## What Doesn’t Sell Books

The report also includes a list of things included in author copy that made no difference at all in the A/B testing. Examples included:

- Mentioning if the book is a bestseller (surprisingly, people didn’t care)
- Writing the book promo as a question (i.e. “Will Sandy find her daughter?” vs. “Sandy searches for her daughter.”)
- Citing the ages of the characters in the book
- Mentioning if it is a debut novel

The report goes on to explain various ways that you can try A/B testing on your own site to find out what is working best in terms of selling books.

I don’t know about you, but I find this information absolutely fascinating. It certainly is going to help me better guide authors that I work with on the dos and don’ts of author website copy going forward.

## 4. Four Musts for Building an Author Email List

An article on Publishers Weekly talks about why it's important for authors to build email lists. In this day and age of social media, too many authors think that Facebook and Twitter followers are enough. They're not.

To paraphrase the author of the piece, here are just a few of the reasons you shouldn't neglect building an author email list:

- You own your own email list and can do with it as you wish
- You control what messages people receive, and when they receive them
- You can track your emails in a way you can't track social media

But here's the challenge: How do you motivate people to sign up for your email list? After all, people are always hesitant to give out their email address. What kind of SPAM will they get? Who will their email address be sold to? Is the reward going to be worth the risk?

Here are four musts for building a proper email list.

1. **Have a good email list management system.** So a user enters their email address on your site. Where does that go? Make sure that you have a system in place before you start collecting this information; a system which stores the email addresses and keeps track of sign-ups, unsubscribes, etc... These types of tools not only take some of the day-to-day management away from you, but they ensure that you're never breaking SPAM laws. There are some plug-ins within WordPress that do this for you, or you could sign up for an account with MailChimp, which is free until you have more than 2,000 names on your list.
2. **Promise security. You've seen the messages.** "We promise not to share your email address with anyone." This is a crucial message to share with your visitors, because too many sites collect your email address and then share it with a third party. For example, say you write a book about pregnancy. And say you collect email addresses of people visiting your site. It's a safe assumption that a good number of them are moms-to-be. Then, say, that you sell that list of email addresses to Pampers or Gerber. Those industries would have a real reason to want access to your email list, and would probably pay you good money to do so. But your users probably wouldn't be thrilled to start getting emails from a company that they never agreed to receive notifications from. This is a great

example of why it's so important to promise people that you won't sell their information.

3. **Offer a real incentive.** What's the main reason you give out your email address? It's probably not because you're especially interested in receiving yet another newsletter. It's usually because there's some sort of incentive (financial or otherwise) for doing so. Maybe you'll get 20% off your next purchase. Maybe it will get you access to some helpful white papers. Think about what you can offer your readers (book club discussion guides, an autographed copy of the book, etc...) as a benefit for signing up and highlight that benefit in a prominent place.
4. **Make it clear what people are signing up for.** This is yet another reason why people may hesitate to give out an email address. What exactly are they going to be getting? Are you going to be sending daily tips? A monthly newsletter? Your newly-posted blog entries? Random emails whenever you have news to share, like a new book being released? Spell out for your readers what they should expect to receive if they give you their email address, which should help relieve some trepidation.

And here's an extra perk if you're successful: authors who have a robust email list are especially appealing to publishers. So follow these leads and watch your subscriber list start to grow.





## Step 3: Learn and Grow

# 1. Six Blogging Mistakes Authors Often Make

I'm a big proponent of authors blogging. That's because a blog is truly the best way for an author to:

- Keep the site current
- Build a following or email list
- Drive traffic to the site via search engines

Many authors hear this. They know they should be blogging. What they don't know is how to blog, or how to make sure they are not blogging "into thin air" so to speak. Here are six mistakes authors make when blogging:

## 1. Not blogging often enough.

Now, authors certainly don't need to blog every day. Not even every week. But probably more than once a month. And certainly more than once a year. I've looked at too many author sites in which the most recent blog was posted over a year ago. That just tells me that not only is the blog not a priority for the author, but the website as a whole is not a priority. It's almost like a big billboard to a visitor that says, "I'm not spending time here. Why should you?"

## 2. Not looking at their blog analytics.

Look at your analytics people! Not doing so is kind of like publishing a book and then not paying attention to if anyone is buying it. Setting up a Google Analytics account is free. You can then log into that account any time and see who is visiting your site. You can learn a lot more about how to review and interpret your analytics report, but let's stick to the basics here. View your report regularly. See how many people actually visited your blog in a given time period. Find out how they got there. Was it via Facebook? Search? Which posts got the most visitors? Is there a trend in posts that seem to resonate? This information is key in helping you figure out what's working and what's not working. This will help you avoid future blogging mistakes.

## 3. Not optimizing for SEO.

This is yet another of the common blogging mistakes. If you're an author — especially a nonfiction author — your blog is likely the most common entryway into your author

website. But in order to do its part, it needs to be optimized for the right keywords. There are a bunch of steps that an author can take to do this, but the basics include:

- Installing the right plug-in (like Yoast, for example)
- Researching the right keyword for each post
- Working that keyword into the blog post title, URL, etc...
- Ensuring that post is submitted to the search engines

Once all of these pieces are working in tandem with one another, your blog posts can each start serving a purpose in driving traffic.



#### **4. Not having a clear voice or message.**

Contrary to what some authors might believe, a blog is not a dumping ground. It's not where you might stick a short story one day, a personal musing the next and a firm editorial after that. A blog is a place where people come to follow your writings. So you need a consistent voice and message. For example, your blog could be a place where you post a weekly short story. Or it could be the venue through which you write a pointed editorial when an item in the news touches on your subject expertise. Or it could have a daily uplifting message — straight out of your book. There are a million ideas for what a blog can be, but it has to be one thing and people need to know what they're getting. Otherwise, why would people continue coming back?

## **5. Not categorizing blog posts.**

Blog post categories are a nifty, difty feature that come with every blogging tool. But they're not utilized often enough; another of the common blogging mistakes.

Categorizing blog posts allows you to break up the hundreds (or thousands) of posts you may have into logical groups. So if, for example, you're a life coach who works with people on career success, financial independence and relationship issues, you may regularly be creating blog posts (in the same message and voice, of course!) that cover all three of those topics.

But maybe a site visitor is only interested in financial independence and isn't really looking for relationship advice right now. Or vice versa. By being able to categorize your blog posts by topic, you can allow visitors to easily sort your posts by topic they're especially interested in.

## **6. Not including enough links.**

One thing that you will notice when you study your analytics is something called the "exit rate" on specific pages. This refers to what percentage of people leave your site after reading what's on this page. Blog posts, in general, tend to have high exit rates. The reason? Not enough links to other things on your site. There are several ways you can fix this common blogging mistake:

- You can work multiple links into the blog post itself. Those can be to other blog posts, your books, etc...
- You can promote other elements of your site on the blog page. For example, if you offer a free chapter of a related book, that should clearly be called out.
- You can use a plug-in that will automatically include links to other blog posts in the same category at the end of the piece. It would look something like, "Read more like this ...." at the bottom of the page, and then send people to related posts.

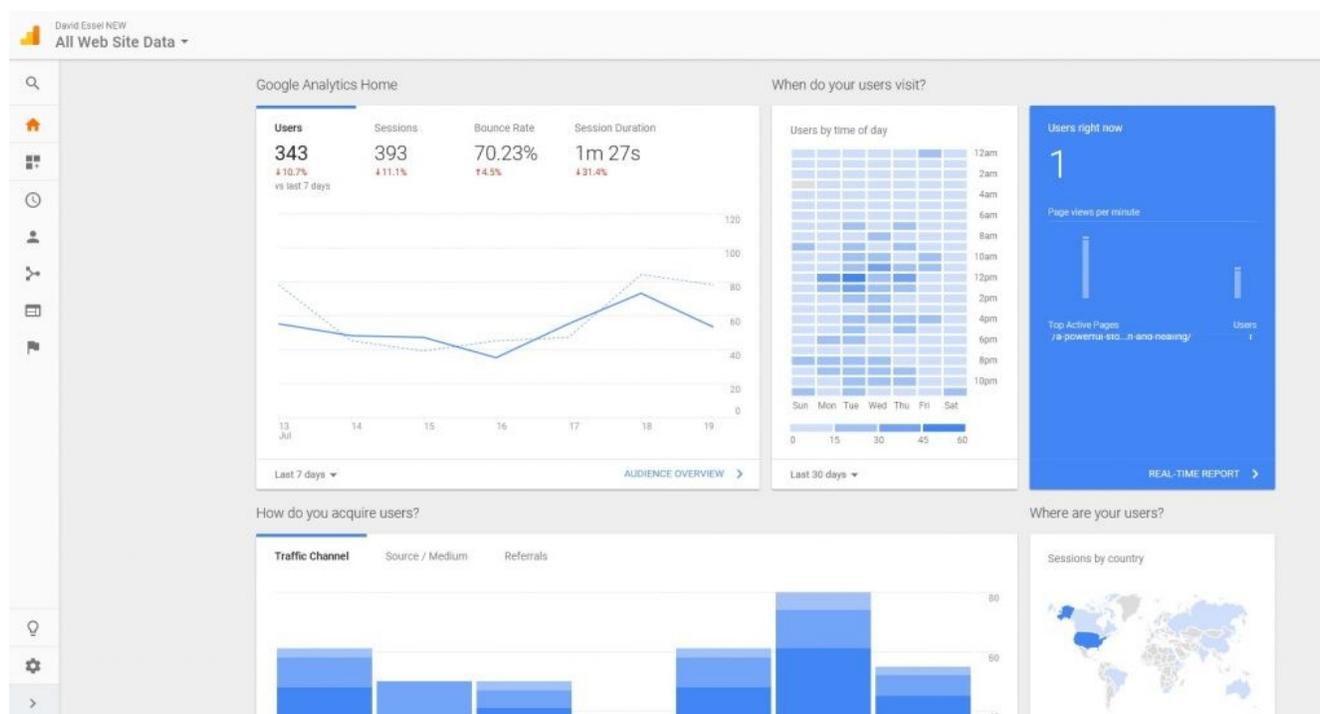
Fix the six problems above and you're more likely to not only get more traffic to your blog, but ultimately sell more books as a result. That's a win-win.

## 2. Your Author Website Analytics: What It May Be Telling You

Are you looking at your author website analytics? What is it telling you? Might you be missing some important clues?

Too many authors can't really tell you what "bounce rate" is or how to define a conversion. But that's not the point of this post. No, what I'm talking about today is some of the hidden messages that you might not notice when you look at your analytics report.

Here are a few things to keep an eye out for on your author website analytics report, and what those stats might really mean...



**1. Total visitors over the last six months.** Total visitors is probably the thing that everyone looks at first in their author website analytics. But have you looked at it as a trend? Compare this month to last month. Then compare it to six months ago. Occasionally, you may want to compare it to a year ago. Only by looking at this data over a period of time can you pinpoint if you're getting better or worse in terms of traffic. You may also want to look at your traffic on a daily basis. What was your highest trafficked day of the month? What do you think made it the highest? This can be a clue to what's working and what's not on the traffic driving front.

2. **Site content.** This allows you to see the pages on your site that get the most traffic. And what's here might surprise you. For example, you may discover that a whopping amount of your traffic goes to the homepage. Other authors see exactly the opposite: they notice that their blog posts are the primary traffic drivers and that hardly anyone even sees their homepage. This can give you a clue as to how people are finding your site and what they're doing when they're there.

3. **Time on site/bounce rate.** It's great that you're getting traffic to your site. But are those people staying on the site? Your author website analytics report will tell you how long people stay per visit, how many pages they visit, on average, and how many people "bounce" (i.e. visit one page and then leave). This will give you a good idea of your website's stickiness. In other words, if they're simply arriving and leaving (i.e. bouncing) you may not be doing a good enough job selling yourself or your book.

4. **Exit rate per page.** Similar to time on site, this data can tell you which pages on your site people are leaving. In other words, if you notice that 70% of the people that leave your site do so from the "About the author" page, then maybe that means that the page doesn't have enough links on it. Or maybe it doesn't entice people to learn more after they've reached the bottom. By really studying which pages people are leaving, you can figure out where to focus your efforts to keep people engaged.

5. **New vs. returning users.** How many people visited your site last month? How many people visited more than once? This is an important metric, because it tells you whether people are stumbling upon your site by accident or if they intentionally come back on a regular basis because you had an impact on them. The most common reason for return visitors on author sites is a strong blog series and/or email newsletter. If one of your goals is to develop a fanbase that will follow you, then having a low percentage of returning users should be a concern.

6. **Technology.** What platforms are people visiting your site on? What platforms are they LEAVING your site on? In other words, if 55% of people visit your site on mobile and the exit rate on mobile is significantly higher than desktop, then that may be a sign that your site isn't easily usable to the mobile audience.

7. **Acquisition channels.** Where is your traffic coming from? In an ideal world, your traffic is nicely divided among the three primary sources: organic search, social and direct traffic (i.e. people typing in your URL). The reason it's nice to have these balanced is that if one falls off, your site still has other traffic sources. So if, for example, Google

changes their algorithm and your site falls from page 1 to page 5 on a search result, you will still have social to keep you afloat. If you look at these stats and one is significantly higher than the other two, you might want to invest some time in finding a better balance.

**8. Site speed.** I talk about site speed a lot. That's because so many authors I've worked with value site design over site speed. But a slow site can seriously increase your bounce rate. It can also hurt your Google search results placement. If you haven't taken a look at your site speed in your author website analytics report, now's the time to do so. Make sure to delve into average site speed, site speed per page AND your site speed on different browsers. The numbers may surprise you.

**9. Conversion rate.** Many authors I work with don't define a conversion on their site. And that's quite a missed opportunity. Whether you consider a successful visit a book purchase, an email sign-up or something else entirely, how do you know if your site is achieving its goals unless you clearly define a conversion and track who converts? This can easily be set up in your author website analytics report. Keep an eye on your conversion data to keep track of what percentage of visitors are converting, which pages they tend to visit before converting, etc... This data can give you worlds of knowledge!

See, there's probably a lot you can learn about what's working — and what's not — on your author website. You just have to know how to interpret the data.

If you want help getting your Google Analytics report set up properly, and help interpreting it, contact us today for a free consultation.

### 3. How Do You Track Book Sales?

So you have an author website. And you, of course, have links to buy your book through your website (or at least I hope you do!) But how do you track book sales? In other words, how do you know if people are actually clicking on those links? And how do you know how many books are being sold?

There are actually few options for doing this.

#### How Do You Track Book Sales From Your Site?

Yes, you can track how many people are clicking on each of your “Buy the book” links. You can even track where they are clicking on them (From your blog? The book description page?) and which particular link they are going to (Amazon Kindle? B&N? Your hardcover?)

All of this can be done relatively simply – and for free – through a redirect URL or WordPress plug-in. This means that you can create a custom, hidden URL for each link that then redirects to the actual link.

So, in other words, you could create a “page” on your site – let’s call it /buy-amazon-hardcover – that immediately redirects to your hardcover page on Amazon. No user clicking on the link would ever see that “blank” page on your site, because they’re only on it for a millisecond before they’re redirected to Amazon. But your site analytics records that visit, and any time you log in to view your analytics you can find out how many people actually went there — or, in layman’s terms, clicked on that particular Amazon link.

As I mentioned before, there are simple WordPress plugins that can do this work for you as well. The one we’ve used is called Redirection and it automates the process of creating these redirect URLs.

But here’s one thing this free functionality doesn’t do: let you know if people actually went through with the purchase. In other words, it tells you if people clicked on the link from your site that took them to the page on Amazon where they could buy the book. What it doesn’t tell you is if those same people actually followed through with the purchase.

## How Do You Track Book Sales in Total?

So now we've talked about tracking how many books you've sold through your site. But what about tracking book sales in total? You clearly want to know how many books you're selling, regardless of where the buyers are coming from.

The free option for doing this can be pretty time consuming. Essentially, any site where your book is sold will allow you to view that data. Your Amazon Author Central account will essentially allow you to view how many copies of your book were sold on Amazon – as well as some other partner sites.

But I still hear from authors that their sales through Smashwords, etc... are not included in these reports. They find themselves looking at multiple sources to figure out how many copies they've sold, and then working to crunch all the numbers into one place. Not fun.

Thankfully, there are several paid services that help you track all your book sales in one place without the legwork. Here are a few examples:

- [Book Report](#)
- [Tracker Box](#)
- [Anchor Earnings Dashboard](#)

So how do you track book sales? Well, there are a variety of options. It all depends on what you want to know, how you want to get that information, and – like everything else in life — how much you're willing to pay for it.

## 4. Author Wisdom: What I Wished I'd Known Sooner

I stumbled across this really interesting conversation on LinkedIn. The question was posed to authors: "What's the one biggest surprise or thing you wish someone would have told you about the authoring or publishing process?"

Here are highlights from some of the responses:

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*You're not just an author, you're a marketing expert and a full-time promoter of your work. Writing the book is the easy part; selling it is a full time job and that job is now yours. If you know that going into it, and you educate yourself well, it's great fun. If you don't realize it ahead of time you're in for a shock.*

**—Susan Veness**

*This is such a great question and my mind is reeling with things I'd like to share, having been a professional cover designer for over 25 years ....new authors don't realize that spine width drives that attention-grabbing factor, and that they can manipulate the book's interior to arrive at a page count that increases perceived value. The ideal page count for a healthy minimal spine width of about a half-inch is 200+.*

**—Kathi Dunn**

*If you're going to be commission the photographer or illustrator yourself, make sure you have a robust, clear agreement ideally assigning copyright, or at the very least an exclusive right to publish in all formats without a time limit. You also need clear written (non-exclusive) permission to use any pre-existing material, text or illustrations, that falls outside fair usage allowances, again in all formats and without time limits. Permissions aren't sexy but if you don't get them right they can really bite you in the backside. Good luck with it all, look forward to seeing the result!*

**—Alison Jones**

*That publishing one or two books is quite an accomplishment and you should be proud, but don't quit your day job: there usually isn't much money in books anymore.*

**—Shawn Tassone, MD, PhD(c)**

*That 99% of the work would be the marketing of the book.... i thought it was all about writers block and empty screens.*

**—Jeff Smith**

*As someone who helps authors build online presences for themselves, I find that the thing that surprises authors the most is the fact that they really need to build a brand — whether that brand is their name, their book title, their series, or their business name (of which their book is one piece). That brand has to be able to be summed up in one sentence and have a logo/color scheme. It's difficult to take something as complicated as a writer or book and make it easily digestible, but that's exactly what authors need to keep in mind all along the way.*

**—Karin Bilich**

## Author Services

If you are interested in taking your book marketing to the next level visit us at [SmartAuthorSites.com](http://SmartAuthorSites.com) and get started today! We can help answer any questions you may have and guide you on your journey!



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## Take your first step to selling books!

We've built hundreds of websites for authors. Let us help you, too. Getting started is quick, easy and free. Just answer some questions.

